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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification would impact school districts' educational processes, identifying areas in which NBPTS certification impacted such factors as: classroom teaching practices; professional development; employment procedures and opportunities; teachers' career paths; NBPTS-certified teacher involvement in districts; learning strategies; course of study alignment; community and parental involvement; and student performance. Surveys of administrators in rural, suburban, and urban Ohio districts indicated that NBPTS certification impacted public school districts' educational processes. Respondents believed that NBPTS-certified teachers focused on best practice, renewed commitment to teaching, put research into practice, and emphasized teaching pedagogy. Only 1 of 13 districts considered NBPTS certification in teacher recruitment practices. Most NBPTS-certified teachers remained in traditional roles as classroom instructors, though administrators realized they had a stronger professional voice in other roles within the district. Most administrators saw positive impacts on student learning and felt teachers were integrating NBPTS standards into practice. Nearly all districts reported an active leadership role for these teachers. No districts indicated changes in the salary schedule for the next school year related to this certification. They viewed the certification as a credential to enhance employability. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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NBPTS-Parallel Certification and Its Impact on the Public Schools:

A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Based on a pilot study of survey research, the authors sought to identify the impact of National Board Certification® on public school districts as reported by administrators. Findings reveal a variety of perceptions among administrators. Further research in a full-scale study may substantiate these findings.

Introduction

The intent of this pilot study is to determine whether National Board Certification impacts districts' educational processes. The authors sought to identify the areas in which National Board Certification impacts such factors as classroom teaching practices, professional development, employment procedures and opportunities, teachers' career paths, National Board Certified Teacher® candidate involvement in districts, learning strategies, course of study alignment, community and parental involvement, and student performance. Open-ended questions in the survey allowed the administrators to make recommendations concerning the facilitation of the National Board Certification process.

Across the country, teachers are attempting one of the biggest challenges of their careers by reaching for National Board Certification. Just as teachers examine their classroom practice to achieve certification, public school districts may need to examine the impact of National Board Certification on their school communities as the number of teachers achieving certification increases.

Recognizing the critical need to elevate the profession in the eyes of the American public, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has establish

a voluntary, advanced, standardized certification assessment for the nation's teachers. In a short period of time, this component of educational reform has impacted not only public school teachers, but also institutes of higher education, local districts, and students as well.

History

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' (NBPTS) mission is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and able to do, to develop and operate a national, voluntary system to assess and certify teachers who meet these standards; and to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools (*What Teachers Should Know And Be Able To Do*, 1989).

Candidates undergo a rigorous two-phase assessment process measuring a teacher's classroom practice against advanced standards in their field. A 1989 central policy statement of NBPTS, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able To Do*, serves as the basis for all standards and assessments. National Board Certificates are defined by subject matter and student developmental range.

In the thirteen years since its inception in 1987, NBPTS has instituted a tremendous change in America's education landscape. The record number of 9,506 candidates in 2000 represents a 55 percent increase over the 1999 number of 6,124 applicants. Funding by the U.S. Department of Education Candidate Subsidy Program provides the opportunity for participation of all fifty states and the District of Columbia. States with the highest number of candidates include North Carolina, 2,253; Florida

1,677; California, 755; Mississippi, 739; Ohio, 716; and South Carolina, 679. The pool of candidates is diverse in terms of race and geographic distribution; candidates are equally divided between schools in rural, urban, and suburban areas. There are currently 4,804 National Board Certified Teachers in the United States. [On-line http:// www.nbpts.org/ nbpts/ Press/ RecordNoCandidates.htm]

In 1997/98, five new certificates were added, the addition of four certificates in 1998/99 makes National Board Certification available for 82 percent of America's teachers. The supplement of National Board Certificates continues with the addition of three certificates available December 2000, bringing the total to 19 certificates that affect nearly 90 percent of the nation's eligible teachers. Plans for completion of thirty certificate areas are currently underway. (What Every Teacher Should Know QA, (2000-2001)) p.6.

As a result of this action, many state departments of education have initiated candidate subsidy programs. In the state of Ohio, a model program at The University of Akron, A Structured, Cohort Approach to Preparation for NBPTS Certification, has shown a steady increase in candidate success since its inception in 1997-98. The candidate success rate rose from forty-five percent in 1997-98 to 65 percent in 1998-1999. The UA support model includes the following effective elements of candidate support:

- Regional cross-site meetings with two other Northeastern Ohio universities
- Large group meetings held monthly which focus on holistic topics
- Small group meetings focusing on critical reflection of teaching practice with teachers of similar certificate areas

- Orientation workshops providing essential information to teachers contemplating the certification process
- NBCT facilitators as mentors, including former UA candidate support program participants
- A one to five National Board Certified Teacher-to-candidate ratio
- Resource availability in multiple formats such as internet listservs, abstracts of current research in education, distance learning/ videoconferencing
- Three types of writing emphasizing description, analyses, and reflection required for portfolio completion
- Technical assistance utilizing PZM® microphones and video cameras
- Artifact selection guidance for portfolio submission
- NBPTS Facilitator Institute training for UA NBCT facilitators

Literature Review

This new emphasis on accomplished teaching is influencing the way teachers are trained, licensed, hired, and recognized. In order to further this dynamic reinvention of teaching in America's schools, a focus on the third component of the NBPTS mission statement is necessary. As stated, "to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in America's schools", it inspires new initiatives (NBPTS,1989,p.1). NBPTS and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have formed a collaborative partnership for the improvement of teacher education programs. This could change the nature of master's programs, from a collection of required courses, to a systematic framework guiding practitioners to

strengthen teaching and improve student learning. As determined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,

"The purpose of the Partnership is to assist colleges and universities in modifying master's degree programs so that they are built upon NBPTS standards; encourage teacher preparation programs to develop standards-based, practice-oriented advanced master's degree curricula; redesign master's programs to integrate subject matter and pedagogical content and include portfolios of practice; and describe models and identify exemplars of courses of study that are closely aligned to the standards for accomplished teaching" *(Pathways to Accomplished Teaching, (1997)).*

The NBPTS standards and assessments provide clear and meaningful benchmarks for a new kind of master's degree. Various research is being conducted on how NBPTS standards can serve as the framework for redesigning universities advanced teacher programs. Recent literature regarding the quality of professional development reveals that it has been offered most often with a focus on content, topic, or strategy du jour (Lewis, 1997; Liberman, 1995; Little, 1987).

According to Glazer (1986) and Conrad et al.,(1993), strong master's programs require study of a specialized subfield outside the unit offering the degree - a collective ownership. The National Board standards include not only an emphasis on teaching, but also on content knowledge, thereby justifying increased collaborative efforts with other fields outside the college or department of education. Subsequently, using NBPTS standards as a starting point will emphasize what is important and valued, i.e., the significance of assessment and reflection that is an iterative process and encourages continual feedback and improvement.

Critical elements of this model would include a focus on content and pedagogy. Therefore, remaining in the classroom would require attention to "education core" according to Galluzo (1997), as well as continued development in one's specialty, e.g., early childhood education, technology, or subject areas such as English, history, science, math, and social studies. Galluzo et al., further emphasizes a focus on classroom based action research and a thorough understanding of developmental and cognitive theory.

This component of the current educational reform movement will be strengthened by the creation of a network of creative partnerships between public school districts, institutes of higher learning, National Board Certified Teachers, and members of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

"As with other partnerships, we learned there is an enormous time and resource commitment to develop and sustain the effort. Continued commitment from the schools and universities must be present so that partnerships can continue to develop. More forces work against a school/ university partnership than for it: separate funding, different rewards and incentives, different short-term goals, different operating practices and governance procedures, and different power players. In fact, it is astonishing that partnerships do develop and a fair number survive and thrive. For those partnerships that make the effort, take the time, and are willing to work together for a common cause, the rewards for the improvement of education can be great" (Auton, Browne, Futrell, 1998).

One such partnership, at The University of Akron, supports NBCT candidates by offering graduate credit applicable to the College of Education's Elementary and Secondary Education master's degree curriculum. Other universities, e.g., San Diego State University, UCLA, The University of Central Florida, University of Kentucky,

Wake Forest, Xavier, and University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, have begun to link their college or department of education graduate curriculum with the NBPTS standards (http:// www.nbpts.org/ nbpts/ about/ IHE.html) .

In *A Nation Prepared* (1986), professionalization of teaching would include several elements toward a model of a newly structured career ladder. This new model is a call to "restructure the teaching force and introduce a new category of Lead teachers with the proven ability to provide leadership in the redesign of the schools and to help their colleagues uphold high standards of learning and teaching." (1986 pp. 55-56).

Some state affiliates of the National Education Association have secured legislation to appropriate money for candidate fee reimbursement and composition for release time. Many local associations are using the collective bargaining process to secure release time, fee payment, mentoring and assistance, and salary recognition for teachers who participate in the National Board Certification process (National Education Association--What It's All About (1999)). Compensation, traditionally augmented by achieving "steps" along a career ladder, becomes an area open for discussion and debate.

According to Ingvarson (1998),

"The emerging standards-based system provides more powerful incentives for professional development *as teachers* by bringing professional development and career development together. It bases career stages primarily on demonstrable advances in professional knowledge and skill, rather than selection for specific jobs in a career ladder hierarchy. In the past, career stages have not been based on evidence of progress toward highly accomplished teaching. In fact a characteristic of teaching has been that career stages have had little relation to teaching standards at all. There has been little or no

relationship between evidence of professional development and promotion as a teacher. This state of affairs has limited the status of teaching in relationship to administration and other careers." (p. 138)

Therefore, as new career paths are made available to teachers, the standard-based professional certification system created by NBPTS will be a major catalyst for a fresh approach to compensation for teachers.

Another area in which National Board Certification is expected to make an impact concerns student learning. Teachers are directed to transform classroom practice to meet the needs of all students. Challenged to establish a rich repertoire of stategies, teachers are expected to design effective educational programs with high expectations for learning. In keeping with increasing student achievement is a focused reality for public schools across the U.S. (Shakowski, 1999). Parents, community, legislators, governors and policy makers hold administrators and teachers accountable for increasing learning and test scores in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Teachers' efforts placed into further training and extended professional development are rewarded many times over by the increased knowledge of their students. According to Wise (1998), the number one factor in enhancing student learning is the capability of the teacher.

All of the factors that affect public school districts are now revisited in light of National Board Certification. Various research is being conducted across the country in master's theses and doctoral dissertations concerning the impact of numerous items associated with NBPTS.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has commissioned several research studies that will be available by the end of 2000. A construct and consequential validity study of NBPTS, begun in October, 1997, compares how a National Board Certified Teacher differs from a non-board certified teacher in three major areas, i.e., ongoing classroom teaching practices, impact on students, and professional activities.

An impact study, involving National Board Certified Teachers from three states, is being conducted by The Coldwater Corporation to not only measure the perceived effect that NBCTs have on staff learning, but also parental perceptions of NBCTs as their children's classroom teachers.

Although NBPTS is conducting numerous research studies of its assessment and scoring systems, methodology and internal policies, limited research has been collected on the impact of National Board Certified Teachers on their respective school districts. George Washington University, however, has accepted the challenge of forging new territory, i.e., and development of a new master's degree program incorporating NBPTS standards based upon a collaborative partnership between George Washington University and the Fairfax County Public Schools. A major finding of their collaborative work is that local school districts play a vital role in developing programs that support NBPTS certification (Auton, Browne, Futrell 1998).

Due to the interest and experience of both researchers, as well as their role in the nature and establishment of The University of Akron model of candidate support, data was collected concerning the perceptions of administrators regarding National Board Certification in their district.

Methods

This descriptive research study utilized survey research to design a questionnaire and conduct subsequent interviews. The questionnaire was developed by two professionals involved with The University of Akron grant-funded NBPTS mentoring cohort, one a Ph.D. involved in the administration of graduate outreach programs, and the other, a National Board Certified Teacher, who serves as a facilitator for the mentoring program. The questionnaire was designed to identify factors perceived as relevant:

- Administrators' knowledge and understanding of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards' mission statement and candidate process
- Professional development of NBCTs and subsequent strengthening of teaching/learning practices
- Student learning
- Employment practices
- Number of National Board Certified mentoring program candidates per district
- Number of National Board Certified Teachers employed per district

Administrators were asked to give their perceptions of the impact that a National Board Certified Teacher had on those factors in the educational process of the district. The survey and results were discussed during interviews with the researchers to determine any ambiguity and/or neglected areas needing investigation.

From a non-random sample, data for the pilot study were collected from five administrators representing rural, suburban and urban public school districts in northeast Ohio. The thirteen school districts were chosen purposefully on the basis of the

researcher's knowledge of the population. The education level of the participants was a minimum of master's degree level. One curriculum director, one director of staff development, three district superintendents, and one county assistant superintendent (representing nine districts), completed the survey and subsequent interviews. All the districts employed National Board Certified Teachers.

Results

The authors found that public school administrators had mixed perceptions regarding the impact of National Board Certification on educational processes in their districts. The limited sample of this pilot study, revealed both positive and negative perceptions. The perceptions are as follows:

1. Administrators were asked to explain their understanding of the National Board's mission as it impacts classroom teaching and teachers' professional development. The consensus among the administrators indicates that National Board Certified Teachers focus on best practice, renew commitment to the profession, put research into practice, and emphasize teaching pedagogy.
2. A second question probed the administrators' perspective on the impact of recruitment and promotion. Administrators indicated limited opportunities for professional advancement, i.e., only one of the thirteen districts considered National Board certification in teacher recruitment practices; one district actively promotes National Board Certification within the district, and one district indicated encouragement of the candidate process to employees.

3. The third question concerned the variety of roles NBCTs held in the district. The majority of teachers in this pilot study, as evidenced by the data, remain in the traditional role of classroom instructor. However, the administrators recognized that NBCTs have a stronger professional voice in other roles within the district, e.g., Praxis® assessors, lead teachers, or professional development workshop leaders.

4. The administrators perused the five core propositions of NBPTS and were asked for their perceptions regarding NBCTs impact on student learning, learning strategies, teaching strategies, student performance, disciplined learning environment, course of study alignment, community/parental involvement, and professional development. Responses were as follows:

- Three administrators indicated positive impacts on student learning; one suggested no data to support any impact; and one stated evidence of a negative impact on student learning.
- Most administrators perceived that the majority of board-certified teachers in their district were integrating NBPTS standards into classroom practice. However, one administrator reported no change in teaching strategies.
- One district reported a slight drop in student performance. One administrator noted the frustration a NBCT had with the Ohio Proficiency Test.
- No responses were reported regarding the creation of a disciplined learning environment.

- On the topic of course of study alignment, administrators reported that NBCTs were more willing to teach content and process than sequential textbook instruction and were viewed as positive change agents in building practices.
- No responses were reported regarding community/parental involvement.
- In the area of professional development, four districts reported an active leadership role as lead teachers, instructional specialists, Praxis® assessors, entry-year teacher mentors, and local professional development committee (LPDC) committee members. One administrator reported that zero NBCTs had assumed leadership roles subsequent to achievement of certification.

5. The piloted study inquired regarding the impact of National Board Certification on districts' employment procedures, i.e. salary schedule, recruitment, retention, release time, union negotiations, NBCT candidate fee reimbursement and NBCT graduate tuition reimbursement. None of the districts indicated any changes in the salary schedule for 2000-2001. Three administrators viewed National Board Certification as a credential to enhance the potential employee's resumé and employability in the district. Retention practices were not cited as a factor in any of the districts. Two administrators expressed a willingness to provide substitute coverage for National Board Certified Teacher candidates during critical points in the process; yet the lack of adequate substitute pools prevents coverage as desired. One district administrator indicated that the topic of National Board certification would be

included in the next district contract negotiations. Candidate fee reimbursement and graduate tuition reimbursement were not available employment incentives in any of the districts.

6. All administrators surveyed were initially unsure of employees' involvement in the National Board candidate process for the 2000-2001 academic year. Administrators were finally asked to provide recommendations to facilitate the National Board process in the following arenas:

- The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards Board of Directors' mission and scope. One administrator advocated a desire for a more selective screening process to insure the highest quality educators' participation in the National Board candidate process.
- Involvement by grant-funded institutions of higher education in mentoring programs. Two administrators reiterated the need for incorporation of NBPTS standards as a major component of a master's program and to maintain an emphasis of student-centeredness and current research in classroom practice.
- Recommendations to the Ohio Department of Education and state legislators for support of improved teaching. All administrators restated the need for monetary considerations, release time, substitute pay dollars and the availability of candidate support funds to all eligible candidates.

Discussion

This pilot study supports the authors' premise that National Board Certification impacts a public school district's educational processes. The improvement

of student learning in America's schools will depend to a large degree on a rich conversation among stakeholders, i.e., state boards of education, the NBPTS Board of Directors, institutes of higher learning, and public school districts. Each stakeholder will be required to determine how each contributor effects the other. The reality of meeting the dual demands of assessment and accountability will affect the latitude of freedom each stakeholder will have in the partnership. Nevertheless, each stakeholder will reap benefits from a partnership established with similar goals. For example, public school district teachers, who as NBCT candidates participate in institutes of higher education NBPTS mentoring programs, and achieve certification, will be viewed as part of the institutions' assets. Other implications of the pilot study are as follows:

1. Strive to achieve a cooperative process among a partnership of faculty and practitioners who share the responsibility of curriculum alignment to facilitate the impact of National Board Certification.
2. Extend communication of the NBPTS process to the larger school community, as parents may be unaware of National Board Certification and the impact of National Board Certified Teachers in the district.
3. Enhance the conversation among district school superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals to further the impact of National Board Certified Teachers' effective teaching strategies.
4. Enlist the help of the district LPDC in the candidate certification process and incorporate it into their professional development piece.
5. Encourage continued commitment to teaching excellence. Honored by their achievement, all National Board Certified Teachers have the critical responsibility

of tempering this honor by maintaining a commitment to professional development and teacher leadership. Currently, the NBPTS Board of Directors is studying renewal options for National Board Certification. NBPTS anticipates the first cohort group of NBCTs involved in the renewal process in November 2002.

6. Consider necessary initiatives at the district level that will encourage a number of teachers in the district to consider candidacy for National Board Certification.

7. Acknowledge that principals may be the district administrators most familiar with the accomplished teaching of a NBCT. Administrative leadership at the building level could increase the impact of these teachers.

8. Establish a career ladder that can attract and retain the best teachers in the classroom.

Full-scale Study

Feedback from the pilot study indicated no ambiguities. The researchers' analyses correlated with the views of the subjects as demonstrated through face-to face interviews. The researchers intend to survey six hundred eleven Ohio school districts and to analyze and identify the common themes emerging from those surveyed. From the results of the full-scale study, hypotheses will be formulated for subsequent quantitative study. Initial indications suggest that some of the questions generated by this pilot study may be substantiated by the full study.

Questions for Further Research

As a result of the questionnaire and personal interviews, the following questions are raised for further research.

1. How will institutes of higher education, public school districts, and National Board Certified Teachers collaborate/partner to change the direction of teachers' professional development?
2. Who will determine the degree of input by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the realignment of undergraduate/graduate education given the recent implementation of a university report card system?
3. Who will create and assess the new models for master degree curricula that appropriately reflect the complexities of teaching?
4. What will be the NBPTS', institutes of higher educations', and public school districts' necessary initiatives to properly assimilate National Board Certification as an essential piece of the educational reform movement?

Conclusion

Despite the amazing progress that National Board Certification has accomplished to change teaching in America, we find ourselves with many challenges remaining. An enthusiastic vision of teaching starts with the invigorated voice of a classroom teacher. Historically, this voice has been soft, and not strong enough to impact an entire district's educational processes. Gaining intensity by the credential of National Board Certification, this voice of accomplished teaching has gained strength and its impact can

be ignored no longer. Collectively, these voices, once confined to an individual classroom, combine to impact and shape teaching and learning in the nation's schools.

Teachers, perhaps now more than ever, are in a unique position to impact the educational community in which they work. Nevertheless, this unequaled opportunity is anchored with tremendous responsibility. Coinciding with this enthusiastic vision of teaching is the voice of skepticism, as is often heard with any major change.

All of the stakeholders in the schools are forced to evaluate this new conversation about teaching. As we explore uncharted territory and contemplate new roles, we determine our choices. As committed professionals, we thoughtfully consider the possibility of viable networks that respond to this call for educational reform. Eager to make a difference, many of us will accept the risks encountered in these partnerships. These new roles will remind us that friction may be a necessary and minor consequence of a movement that has the potential to impact so many.

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Interviews

1. Dr. David Kirkton, Revere Local Schools, September, 2000

2. Dr. Gerome Pecko, Barberton City Schools, September, 2000

3. Mr. William Koran, Medina County Schools, September, 2000

4. Dr. Elizabeth Lolli, Mayfield Heights City Schools, September, 2000

5. Ms. Bernadine Burchett, Akron Public Schools, September, 2000